PERSONALITY

A Six-Day Unit Lesson Plan for High School Psychology Teachers

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PERSONALITY

A Six-Day Unit Lesson Plan for High School Psychology Teachers

This unit is aligned to the following content and performance standards of the *National Standards for High School Psychology Curricula* (APA, 2011):

DOMAIN: INDIVIDUAL VARIATION

STANDARD AREA: PERSONALITY

CONTENT STANDARDS

After concluding this unit, students understand:

1. Perspectives on personality
2. Assessment of personality
3. Issues in personality

CONTENT STANDARDS WITH PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

CONTENT STANDARD 1: Perspectives on personality

Students are able to (performance standards):
1.1 Evaluate psychodynamic theories
1.2 Evaluate trait theories
1.3 Evaluate humanistic theories
1.4 Evaluate social-cognitive theories

CONTENT STANDARD 2: Assessment of personality

Students are able to (performance standards):
2.1 Differentiate personality assessment techniques
2.2 Discuss the reliability and validity of personality assessment techniques

CONTENT STANDARD 3: Issues in personality

Students are able to (performance standards):
3.1 Discuss biological and situational influences
3.2 Discuss stability and change
3.3 Discuss connections to health and work
3.4 Discuss self-concept
3.5 Analyze how individualistic and collectivistic cultural perspectives relate to personality

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INTRODUCTION

Personality is a high-interest topic in high school psychology because most students are in Erik Erikson's identity versus role confusion stage and are in the process of solidifying many aspects of their own personality. This unit lesson plan gives students the opportunity to see many other topics in psychology (such as research methods) used in the definition, measurement, and development of personality. The unit provides for good debate and critical thinking in how personality can relate to the interaction of biology and experience (i.e., nature and nurture), the different perspectives in psychology, learning theory, and reliability and validity of testing.

The unit lesson plan starts with an introduction to personality and then looks at how psychologists assess personality. The unit plan then focuses on the psychoanalytic, humanistic, social-cognitive, and trait theories of personality, communicating strengths and weaknesses of each approach. The final lesson focuses on how personality can relate to work, health, and culture to provide practical applications for the study of personality.

This unit plan should provide an opportunity for introspection for high school students. By the end of the unit plan, they should have learned some terms that relate to their own personalities, such as locus of control and self-efficacy. They will also have a better understanding of what factors may have played a role in their personality development and will have considered some of the basic debates about whether personalities are stable across situations and time. Most importantly, they should also be familiar with the Big Five model of personality traits—the most commonly used model in contemporary personality research.

PROCEDURAL TIMELINE

LESSON 1: AN INTRODUCTION TO PERSONALITY

Activity 1: What Is Personality? A Personal Appraisal

LESSON 2: ASSESSMENT OF PERSONALITY

Activity 2: Personality and Personality Assessment

LESSON 3: PSYCHODYNAMIC THEORIES OF PERSONALITY

Activity 3.1: Freud's Personality Theory: Id, Ego, Superego Role-Play Activity

Activity 3.2: Defense Mechanisms Application Activity

LESSON 4: TRAIT AND SOCIAL-COGNITIVE THEORIES OF PERSONALITY

Activity 4: Measuring Locus of Control

LESSON 5: HUMANISTIC THEORIES OF PERSONALITY

LESSON 6: PERSONALITY: CULTURE, WORK, AND HEALTH

CONTENT OUTLINE

LESSON 1

An Introduction to Personality

I. What is personality?

A. **Personality:** Individual differences in characteristic patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving

1. **"Thinking"**: Personality includes differences between people in how they typically think.

   Example: Do people tend to focus on the positive (optimists) or the negative (pessimists)?

2. **"Feeling":** Personality includes differences between people in how they typically feel.

   Examples: Do people tend to be happy or unhappy? Do they experience intense emotions or not? Do they get angry easily? Are they especially sensitive to rejection?

3. **"Behaving":** Personality includes differences between people in how they typically behave.

   Examples: Do they tend to talk a lot? Do they usually go along with what other people want or insist on doing things their way? Are they neat and tidy or sloppy and disorderly? Do they like to try new things, or do they always order the same thing when they go out to eat?

B. Personality does not refer to physical characteristics, abilities, or temporary states.

1. Personality refers to differences between people in their psychological characteristics, not physical or biological differences (e.g., height or age).

   Example: A person's level of testosterone can influence his or her typical pattern of behavior. However, level of testosterone itself isn't considered a personality characteristic, though it may be related to personality characteristics.

2. Personality doesn't include many skills or abilities. Personality is about what people are typically like, not what they are capable of at their best.

   Example: Just because someone can be an excellent negotiator or a skilled chess player, that doesn't mean it is part of his/her personality.

3. Personality doesn't include fleeting states like hunger, arousal, or mood. Just because a person happens to be happy at a given moment doesn't mean it is part of his/her personality; that is why the "characteristic patterns" part of the definition is so important.

C. Personality includes prominent consideration of diversity because the theories and the tests that arise out of diversity have been primarily based on the observations of a specific group (European American males).

   Examples: Do the theories apply to all ethnic groups? Do East Asians or Westerners think the same way (Nisbett, 2003)? Can the test be generalized for groups? Can the theories be generalized for more than one group of people?

II. Personality vs. situation

In the 1970s and early 1980s, the field of psychology was engaged in a big debate, sparked by a book by **Walter Mischel,** over whether or not personality actually explains why people behave as they do.

A. On the personality side, researchers argued that differences between people can be measured and that these differences can help researchers predict and explain why they do the things they do.

   Example: People higher on extroversion tend to talk more.

B. On the situation side, researchers argued that the situation people are in will have such a strong influence on their behavior that their personality will not matter.

1. Many researchers on the "situation" side believed personality was an illusion, people think everyone has a personality, and although everyone differs from each other in reliable ways, really everyone is very similar to each other; the reason people behave differently from each other is because they find themselves in different situations.

2. The strongest evidence for the "situation" side of the debate came from impressive social psychological studies that showed how powerful situations can be.

   Example: Milgram's famous experiment showed that an authority figure can influence people to give a stranger what they believe to be a painful electric shock just by creating the right situation (a professor in a white lab coat telling you that the experiment must continue, etc.). This supposedly showed that traits such as obedience and conformity can be manipulated by situational variables and are actually only temporary states.

3. However, the "person" side of the debate responded by pointing out that just because situations have a strong influence on behavior does not mean people will all behave the same in the same situation.

   Example: Even in Milgram's experiment, an important percentage of people refused to go along with the orders.

C. Thus, there is room for both personality and situation to have an important influence on behavior.

III. The influence of personality

A. Is personality stable across situations?

1. The first step in establishing that people really do differ in their "characteristic patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving" is to show that those differences are indeed characteristic patterns; that they can be observed over and over again across a variety of situations.

2. Of course nobody is going to be exactly the same in every situation, so the challenge is to show there is some stability.

a. Stability in personality is typically defined as **"rank-order consistency,"** which means people's ranking on a personality trait stays similar from one situation to the next.

   Example: Is the person who is most extroverted around her classmates also more extroverted than her peers at soccer practice, with her family, and at a pep rally?

b. Results from many personality studies (e.g., Specht, Egloff, & Schmukle, 2011; Roberts & Mroczek, 2008) show there is indeed rank-order consistency in people's personalities.

B. Is personality stable over time?

1. Another challenge in showing there really are personality differences is to show that personality is persistent—it stays more or less the same over time.

   a. This is important because if personality changes all the time, then it could be that our personality is just the result of the situation we're in, and when our situation changes (e.g., when we move away to college, we get married, we change jobs), our "personality" also changes.

   b. To show that the differences between people are not just the result of the different situations people are in, it's important to show that even when major aspects of their situation change—when people go through major life changes—personality still remains relatively stable. Bleidorn (2012) and Donnellan, Conger, & Burzette (2007) showed there is mean-level change in personality during the transition from adolescence to adulthood, but not much rank order change. Lucas (2007) showed negative life events do have long-term (negative) effects on well-being, but positive events (e.g., marriage) only have short-term (positive) effects.

   c. No one would expect perfect stability from birth to death, but the challenge is to show there is some rank-order consistency over decades—the people who are the most extroverted, friendly, or emotional in their childhood also tend to be pretty extroverted, friendly, or emotional in middle and late adulthood.

2. The research on this topic is pretty clear: People do change, but they don't change drastically (Specht, Egloff, & Schmukle, 2011; Roberts & Mroczek, 2008).

    a. Very extroverted people rarely become introverted and vice versa.

    b. The rank-order of a person relative to his or her peers stays pretty stable over the course of life.

    c. Interestingly, however, there are some changes that almost everyone experiences—for example, people tend to become more responsible and more emotionally stable as they age.

    d. Because this happens to (almost) everybody, it doesn't change the people's rank order—everyone is a little less emotionally volatile; but the most volatile people at age 15 are still more volatile than most of their peers at ages 30, 50, and 70.

3. Some people do change their rank order, and researchers don't know much about why or how these individuals do it. These changes are most likely to happen in adolescence and early adulthood—before the age of 30. Personality seems to be pretty stable, even over decades and after big life changes (Specht, Egloff, & Schmukle, 2011).

C. Do people agree about a person's personality?

1. Another way to show personality is real is to show people tend to know an extrovert (or a creative person or an emotional person) when they see one—or at least when they get to know one pretty well. This is important because if personality is real, people should be able to see it in each other. Of course some aspects of personality are hard to see in strangers—most people don't broadcast their negative characteristics to the world, for example—but people who know a person well should all agree more or less about that person's personality.

    Example: If John is extroverted, stubborn, messy, and generous, his mom, friends, and teammates should pretty much agree that he is.

2. Personality researchers have found, although everyone doesn't agree perfectly, there is a good deal of agreement on a person's personality, even between parents and friends or hometown friends and college friends. This is especially impressive because these people usually haven't met each other and know the person in different contexts.

3. Psychological constructs such as extroversion versus introversion are universally accepted as cross-cultural, whereas other psychological constructs, such as assertiveness versus non-assertiveness, may have minimal differentiation and appear to have no meaning in some cultures. (Allen, 2006).

D. Does personality predict behavior?

1. One of the most important tests of whether personality exists is the predictability of behavior based on personality. It is impossible to predict how a person will behave in every situation, but because personality is supposed to describe typical patterns of behavior, knowing someone's personality should help predict how they tend to behave over time and across many situations. Personality researchers have produced a lot of evidence that personality does predict behavior.

2. *Examples* (from Ozer & Benet-Martinez, 2006; Roberts et al., 2007; Mehl, Gosling, & Pennebaker, 2006):

    a. Extroversion predicts talking, happiness, social status, volunteerism.

    b. Agreeableness predicts swearing less, being less likely to divorce, volunteerism, less criminal behavior.

    c. Conscientiousness predicts occupational success, college GPA, less drug use, being less likely to divorce.

    d. Emotional stability predicts less depression, being less likely to divorce and less likely to fight in romantic relationships.

    e. Openness to experience predicts more traveling/studying abroad and being more likely to vote for liberal candidates/causes and choose artistic careers.

IV. Personality origins

A. There has been a lot of debate about whether personality is innate (nature) or learned from one's experiences in childhood and beyond (nurture). As with many debates, the answer is that both sides are partly correct. Personality is influenced by genes and can be observed even in young infants, but it is also shaped by the experiences and changes over the course of a person's life (see III B above).

B. Genetic influences on personality

1. Before it was possible to map people's genomes, researchers came up with a clever way to test the influence of genes by comparing identical (monozygotic) and same-sex fraternal (dizygotic) twins.

    a. The idea is that identical twins and same-sex fraternal twins are equally similar to each other in terms of the environment they grow up in—in both cases, they have the same parents, live in the same neighborhood, go to the same school, etc.

    b. However, identical twins share 100% of the genes that vary in humans, whereas fraternal twins share only 50% on average (same as non-twin siblings).

    c. Therefore, if identical twins have personalities more similar to each other's than fraternal twins, this strongly suggests that personality is partly influenced by genes. However, identical twins are more often treated more alike than fraternal twins.

    d. Adoption studies can also be used to study the influence of environment and genetics. Adopted children are compared through correlation studies to their adopted parents (nurture) and their biological parents (nature).

2. **Heritability** refers to the extent to which a characteristic (e.g., extroversion, height) is influenced by genes.

3. Genes and traits

    a. So far, research that examines specific genes (molecular genetics) has had very little success identifying specific genes that predict specific traits.

b. That doesn't mean personality isn't influenced by genes, it just means there probably aren't a few specific genes that influence any given personality trait.

C. Environmental influences on personality

1. Researchers agree that both genes and people's experiences account for differences between people, but they have had little success identifying exactly which experiences have what type of effect on personality. As it turns out, the same environment influences people in different ways.

   Example: Having a strict parent might make some kids more rule-abiding and others more rebellious.

2. Researchers have identified few life experiences that have a systematic effect on personality (i.e., that tend to shift everyone's personality in the same way). However, two such examples follow.

   Examples: When young adults enter their first serious romantic relationship, they tend to become more agreeable and more emotionally stable. Also, when people start their first job, they tend to become more agreeable and more conscientious (Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001; Roberts, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2003).

3. Culture is rooted in language, and language can shape cognitive processes (Shoda & Mischel, 1993). Thus, characterizations of situations can vary across cultures and subcultures, because, even where the language is the same for two or more cultures or subcultures, usage of a word can differ by culture or subculture. (Allen, 2006).

   Example: The British English word for "football" refers to the game American English refers to as soccer, while the American English use of "football" means American football, not soccer.

GO TO ACTIVITY 1
What Is Personality? A Personal Appraisal

LESSON 2

Assessment of Personality

I. Measuring personality

A. Personality measures

1. Personality can be measured in many different ways. Many people have seen personality tests in magazines or websites that claim people can learn about their personality based on what color, animal, or food they like. Many of these tests are not valid (e.g., they do not capture the psychological concept personality is supposed to represent).

2. Self-report questionnaires

   a. **Self-report:** The assumption behind this questionnaire that asks respondents what they are like is that people have a pretty good idea of how they typically think, feel, and behave. Therefore, if clear, direct questions are written about people's personality, and the people answer honestly, researchers can learn a lot. Many people are familiar with the Myers-Briggs self-report questionnaire, but it is not an empirically valid personality questionnaire (see Grant, 2013).

   b. **Face validity:** Self-report questionnaires ask face-valid questions about personality. A face-valid question has no tricks or hidden agendas. It measures what it looks like it is measuring.

      Example: If a researcher wants to know if someone is extroverted, he or she can ask them "Do you tend to talk a lot?" "Do you like being around people?" etc.

   c. **Questionnaire design:** Most personality questionnaires use *Likert-type* statements. (Likert was a U.S. psychologist (1903-1981)).These are statements (e.g., "I am often anxious.") on which the respondent indicates how strongly he/she agrees or disagrees with on a continuous scale (e.g., from 1 to 5, in which 1 is "strongly disagree" and 5 is "strongly agree").

d. Strengths of self-report questionnaires

i. People have a lot of information about themselves because they have seen themselves in many different situations over many years.

ii. People have direct access to their own thoughts and feelings.

iii. Self-reports also have the important advantage of being a convenient way to measure personality because researchers don't need the help of anyone other than the person whose personality they want to measure.

e. Weaknesses of self-report questionnaires

i. People may not always tell the truth, especially when a lot is at stake, like in a job interview.

ii. People may not always know the truth about themselves, especially for aspects of personality that are desirable or undesirable, like intelligence or rudeness.

3. **Informant report questionnaires**

a. Informant report questionnaires are completed by people who know the target (the person whose personality the researcher wants to know about) well.

b. Questionnaire design: Informant report questionnaires are almost identical to self-report questionnaires. They also typically use Likert-type questions. The only difference is that instead of rating their agreement or disagreement with statements about themselves, informants rate their agreement or disagreement with statements about the target (e.g., "She/he is often anxious.")

c. Strengths of informant report questionnaires

i. Many people can serve as informants.

ii. Informants have lots of information because they see the target in many situations and usually have known the target for a long time.

iii. Some personality traits are defined by how others see the target.

Example: You're only as funny, charming, and likeable as other people think you are. For these traits, informant reports may be better than self-reports.

d. Weaknesses of informant report questionnaires

i. Informant reports are not always convenient; sometimes it's hard to get hold of informants.

ii. There are some things informants don't see.

Example: Family members may not know what a high school student is like at school, and the student's friends or classmates may not know what he or she is like at home.

iii. Some personality traits are defined not by how other people see you, but how you see yourself.

Example: If you feel anxious a lot, you're an anxious person—it doesn't matter if other people think you're not anxious.

iv. Informants typically like the target they're rating a lot, so they may be biased and have a rosier perception of the target than is warranted.

B. **Behavioral measures:** A person's personality can be measured by observing their behavior or the traces of their behavior.

1. *Examples:*

a. Ask people to come to a researcher's laboratory to engage in a structured interaction with a group of strangers. Videotape the interaction and code participants' behaviors. Do they talk a lot? Do they interrupt others? Do they exhibit nervous speech patterns, hand movements, etc.? Do they come up with creative ideas?

b. Ask people to wear a recorder that will record the sounds of their behavior as they go about their daily life. This has the advantage of capturing what people are like outside of the laboratory: Do they spend a lot of time interacting with others? Do they swear a lot? How friendly are they?

c. Ask to examine the contents of people's music collections, book collections, bedrooms, offices, Facebook profiles. All of these are places where people's personalities leave their mark. For example, people with a high level of extroversion tend to listen to more upbeat, popular music than people low in extroversion. People with a high level of openness to experience have more diverse book and movie collections than people low in openness to experience.

d. Ask for records of major life events. For example, how many times has the person been married? Divorced? Arrested? What is the person's GPA? Sometimes answers to these life events can tell you something about a person's personality.

2. Strengths of behavioral measures

a. Objectivity: Behavior is easy to observe and is quantifiable in a meaningful way. A person either talks or doesn't, uses a swear word or doesn't, listens to lots of jazz music or doesn't.

b. Because there is less subjectivity involved with behavioral measures than with self- or informant-report questionnaires, personality is easier to measure.

3. Weaknesses of behavioral measures

Some behaviors are hard to link specifically to one personality trait.

Example: What does a person's being divorced five times say about that person's personality? It could indicate low levels of agreeableness, high levels of neuroticism, bad luck, or any number of other causes.

C. **Tests:** Unlike a personality questionnaire, a **personality test** is designed to ask questions that are not completely direct (i.e., not face valid). Tests try to get the answers to these questions by evaluating how someone answers specific questions. Personality tests don't come out and ask what they really want to know (e.g., "How narcissistic are you?"). Instead, they ask indirect questions and interpret your answers to determine your personality. The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) is a good example of a personality test.

Example: One item on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Terry, 1988) is: "If I ruled the world, it would be a better place." If you agree with that item, the researcher does not conclude that you have the personality trait "good world leader," rather, the researcher interprets your answer as a clue that you might be high on narcissism (High or low levels will be referred to as "high on" and "low on.").

1. Projective tests

    a. **Projective tests** are special kinds of tests based on the idea that if you give people an ambiguous stimulus and ask them to describe it, their answer will tell you something about their personality.

    b. The most well-known example is the **Rorschach test.** Another example is the **Thematic Apperception Test** (the version used in research now is called the **Picture Story Exercise**).

        i. Psychologists who use the Rorschach test believe people's descriptions of what they see in ink blots tell something about their personality. The test is linked to psychoanalysis (see Lesson 3).

        ii. There is little evidence that these tests are valid (see section on validity below).

2. Objective tests

    a. Most personality tests are **"objective tests,"** so-named because they are not projective (not because they are especially objective). These include any tests with yes/no response options, numerical response options, etc.

    Examples: The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) and the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI)

    b. The **rational method of creating objective tests:** Researchers write items that seem like they would be a good measure of the personality trait they want to measure.

    Example: Researchers involved in creating the NPI included items they thought would provide clues about the respondent's level of narcissism.

c. The **empirical method of creating objective tests** is to write many items, try them all out, and keep the ones that are actually a good measure of the trait the researcher wants to measure.

Example: The MMPI was created this way—this is why some of the items on the MMPI (e.g., "Do you prefer baths to showers?") seem to have nothing to do with what the MMPI is measuring (personality disorders). The items predict who has a personality disorder or not, and even if we can't understand why they do, they are included in the test because they work.

d. Strength of objective tests

Personality tests are less susceptible to faking than self-report questionnaires. It's harder to change your answers to get a specific score, because it's not always obvious what the test is measuring or how you should answer to get the score you want.

e. Weakness of objective tests

Objective tests require the researcher to interpret your answer, and that interpretation could be wrong (note that here, "interpret" means making empirical associations with outcomes of interest). Thus, interpreting an answer as a sign of narcissism (or anything else) is a little risky because it requires making some assumptions that may or may not be true.

Example: Perhaps you agreed with the statement, "If I ruled the world, it would be a better place" not because you think you would be a particularly good world leader, but because you are very disappointed with the current world leaders.

II. Characteristics of a good personality measure

A. **Reliability:** The consistency of a measurement

1. Reliability does not indicate how accurate or true the measure is. Reliability is about consistency, not about accuracy.

2. There are different ways to measure reliability.

    a. **Test-retest reliability** is when you get similar results when you measure someone's personality using measure X at time 1 and then again at time 2.

        Example: Imagine an average-sized adult weighing himself on a scale. The first time he steps on the scale, it indicates he weighs 25 pounds. He steps off and 5 minutes later steps on again. Again, it indicates he weighs 25 pounds. This scale is reliable. It's just not accurate.

    b. **Internal consistency** applies to measures with multiple items (e.g., a self-report questionnaire with 10 items). Internal consistency is the degree to which the various items produce similar scores (i.e., measure the same thing). There are many ways to measure internal consistency, including "split-half reliability," which refers to the consistency between one half of the items (e.g., all the odd-numbered items) and the other half of the items on the same measure (e.g., all the even-numbered items).

    c. **Parallel forms reliability** refers to the consistency across the different forms when there are different versions, or "forms," of a scale. Would people get the same score if given either Form A or Form B? The SAT is an example of a measure with parallel forms. It is important that the SAT have parallel forms reliability, because if a person's scores were to change a lot depending on which form he or she got, that would be an inconsistent, unreliable measure.

3. Threats to reliability

    a. Researcher error: It is possible a researcher could make a mistake that leads to a different score on one measurement occasion from another.

        Examples: A researcher reading a question out loud to a participant may have read it wrong. Or perhaps a word in one of the questions is ambiguous.

b. Respondent fluctuations: A person responding to the personality questionnaire may have changed his mind about one of the questions from the first time he or she responded.

Example: Perhaps the first time a researcher asked a person if he's often anxious, he said yes because at that moment he was anxious, and it was easy for him to remember other times he'd been anxious. Then, the second time the researcher gave him the questionnaire he said he's not often anxious because at that time he was calm and did not remember often feeling anxious.

B. **Validity:** The accuracy of a measure.

1. For a measure to be valid, it must be reliable. It should consistently give the right answer.

2. Ways to test the validity of the measure:

   a. **Convergent validity:** This determines if the measure agrees with other measures of the same personality trait.

   Example: Does a new self-report measure of extroversion agree with existing measures of extroversion?

   b. **Discriminant validity:** This determines if the measure is unrelated to other measures of unrelated traits.

   Example: To show a researcher is measuring extroversion and not something else (e.g., self-esteem), he or she must show the measure of extroversion is not related to measures of other traits.

   c. **Predictive validity:** This determines if the measure helps predict behaviors and outcomes related to the trait.

   Example: Does a self-report measure of extroversion predict things that extroversion should predict, like who actually talks more, who has more Facebook friends, and who spends more time socializing?

d. **Generalizability:** This determines if the measure is equally valid for all people/situations/times/places.

   i. Sometimes a measure can be valid for certain groups of people (e.g., Caucasians, college students, women, adolescents) but not others. Therefore, it is important to know exactly for which groups of people the measure is valid.

   ii. The same goes for places or times or situations. It's possible the measure is only valid in some cultures or during one time period or under certain circumstances.

GO TO ACTIVITY 2
Personality and Personality Assessment

LESSON 3

Psychodynamic Theories of Personality

While Sigmund Freud's theories—along with the theories of Carl Jung and the Neo-Freudians (e.g., Alfred Adler, Karen Horney, Erik Erikson)—are important for historical reasons, there is little empirical evidence for many aspects of these theories, and few current personality researchers directly study these theories. Teachers should note the importance of presenting students with the most current and empirically validated facts and knowledge on personality psychology.

For historical information on Jung and the Neo-Freudians, see **Appendix A**.

I. Psychodynamic theories of personality

A. The psychodynamic approach to personality stems from **Sigmund Freud's** theories about how and why people become who they are.

Psyche: According to Freud, an internal structure of the mind is made up of three parts: the id, the ego, and the superego.

1. **Id** is the irrational, emotional, impulsive part of the mind that pushes people to act on their impulses and seeks immediate gratification.
2. **Ego** is the rational part of the mind that considers all perspectives and weighs the pros and cons of a course of action. The ego has a more long-term perspective than the id.
3. **Superego** is the moral part of the mind that seeks to follow rules, social norms, and personal value. It pushes people to act in accordance with their values and ideals.

B. Conflict

1. These three parts of the mind can sometimes function independently, but they often come into **conflict,** "pushing" for opposite behaviors.

2. In these cases, the ego is supposed to be the moderator between the id and superego and make an executive decision.

3. According to Freud, unresolved conflict between the different parts of the mind leads to anxiety.

GO TO ACTIVITY 3.1

Freud's Personality Theory: Id, Ego, Superego Role-Play Activity

C. Scientific evidence

1. Researchers now know the mind is not actually divided into three parts, but there is considerable evidence (e.g., Yarkoni & Braver, 2010) that people differ in terms of their capacity for "executive control"—the ability to monitor their various urges and motivations and choose a course of action that strikes the right balance.

2. There is also considerable debate about whether the mind has multiple parts that can operate independently from each other, with many researchers arguing that the idea of multiple, separate units in the mind is a more or less accurate representation of how the mind works (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992).

D. **The importance of the unconscious:** The psychodynamic theories of personality emphasize that an individual's behavior (and thus his or her personality) is not always the result of conscious mental processes; many of the processes underlying behavior are unconscious. This has several corollaries:

1. **Self-knowledge:** If some of the motives for our behavior reside in our unconscious, we may not be aware of all aspects of our personality. Thus, people may have personality characteristics they honestly don't believe they have.

2. **Psychic determinism** is the view that every act is determined by what is going on in a person's conscious and unconscious mind. Freud claimed that all behaviors are a reflection of what is going on in the person's mind.

3. **Defense mechanisms:** Freud believed that part of the reason so much of personality resides in the unconscious is because many motives, thoughts, and feelings are threatening for us to admit to ourselves. Thus, we develop means to keep those aspects outside of our consciousness by developing self-protective strategies. These strategies are called defense mechanisms and include the following.

    a. **Denial** is refusing to acknowledge something.

    b. **Repression** is pushing something out of your mind so you do not think about it. You don't actively deny it; rather, you just decide not to think about it and eventually forget it.

    c. **Reaction formation** is convincing yourself of the opposite of what is actually true.

    d. **Projection** is attributing an unwanted trait or thought to someone else.

    e. **Rationalization** is coming up with a logical, rational (but false) explanation for a shameful thought or action.

    f. **Intellectualization** is converting a threatening trait or thought into a cold, intellectual fact.

    g. **Displacement** is redirecting an unwanted impulse toward something more acceptable.

    h. **Regression** is reverting to an earlier stage of life development when you are faced with conflict.

    i. **Sublimation** is converting shameful impulses into something noble; redirecting the energy to something more acceptable.

GO TO ACTIVITY 3.2
Defense Mechanisms Application Activity

II. Psychic energy

A. Freud also posited that we keep things from our conscious awareness in part because it is too threatening to admit certain things about ourselves (e.g., certain motives that are driven by our id). However, according to Freud, keeping things from reaching conscious awareness requires psychic energy, and people only have a limited amount of psychic energy. Thus, the more we keep in our unconscious, the greater stress and strain we will experience. To release that strain, and to free up some psychic energy, we must explore our unconscious and face some of the facts that we have kept hidden from ourselves.

B. **Free association**

1. Free association is the practice of saying every thought that comes to mind without censoring anything.

2. The idea is that if you let your mind talk without imposing any limits, things that are normally censored by your conscious mind will come out, and you will learn something about what is in your unconscious.

3. This will then free up some psychic energy you had previously been using to keep that information unconscious.

C. **Dream analysis** and **Freudian slips**

1. Freud also believed dreams reveal something about the unconscious mind. He advocated dream analysis as a way to bring the contents of the unconscious mind into conscious awareness.

2. Other places to look for the unconscious leaking out include jokes and mistakes (slips).

   Example: Calling a current love interest by a former love interest's name would be a slip.

D. Scientific evidence

1. The idea that people are unaware of all of their motives has held up well to scientific scrutiny. Researchers have shown people can be unaware of some of their motives, and sometimes they can even be unaware of some of their feelings and behaviors (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977).

2. However, other details about the unconscious proposed by Freud have held up less well to scientific scrutiny (e.g., the psychosexual stages of development, the idea of the sex and death drives being behind almost everything we do, the meaning of dreams).

3. See Chapter 1 of Tim Wilson's book *Strangers to Ourselves* (Wilson, 2004) for a description of the similarities and differences between Freud's unconscious and the latest scientific evidence about the unconscious.

III. Personality (psychosexual) development according to the psychodynamic perspective

A. Freud argued that early childhood experiences are extremely important for personality development. Adults are the way they are in large part because of what happened to them in childhood.

B. Freud believed most people went through five stages of psychosexual development, and failure to progress through each of these stages was associated with particular personality problems.

C. Fixation is a lingering focus of pleasure-seeking energies at an earlier psychosexual stage during which conflicts were unresolved. For example, a fixation on oral pleasure would indicate being stuck in the oral stage as described below.

D. Each stage is associated with a particular psychological struggle and also with a physical focus.

1. Stage one: The oral stage

a. According to Freud, from birth to about 18 months of age, the biggest psychological struggle babies face is their dependence on others.

b. The physical focus of this stage is the mouth, tongue, and lips.

c. Failure to successfully pass through this stage can lead to the adult personality characteristic of being overly dependent or its opposite, overly independent.

d. Oral fixations include using the mouth to self-soothe under stress, such as smoking, biting fingernails, employing sarcasm, etc.

2. **Stage two: The anal stage**

    a. According to Freud, from age 18 months to 3-1/2 years, the primary struggle children face is obedience and self-control. Children typically go through potty training during this stage.

    b. The physical focus of this stage is the anus.

    c. Failure to successfully pass through this stage can lead to the adult personality characteristic of being extremely rule-abiding and obsessed with order (anal retentive) or its opposite, being rebellious, chaotic, and anti-authority (anal expulsive).

3. **Stage three: The phallic stage**

    a. According to Freud, from age 3-1/2 to 6 years, the primary struggle children face is figuring out their gender identity and sexuality.

    b. The physical focus of this stage is the sexual organs.

    c. Failure to successfully pass through this stage leads to the adult personality characteristic of being over-sexualized (e.g., flirty) or its opposite, being undersexualized (e.g., overly modest).

4. **Stage four: Latency**

    According to Freud, from age 7 years to puberty, children do not face any special psychological struggles and are not fixated on any body part. All earlier issues remain hidden in the unconscious.

5. **Stage five: The genital stage**

    a. According to Freud, from puberty onward, the primary struggle is the creation and enhancement of life.

    b. Freud believed that people rarely completely resolve this struggle, but if they were to, the result would be a healthy, mature adult personality.

    c. There is no particular body part associated with this stage, though the physical focus more generally is one's sexuality, especially in relation to others (i.e., intimate relationships).

E. Scientific evidence

1. There has not been much scientific support for Freud's ideas about psychosexual development. Furthermore, research to date has not turned up much evidence that early childhood experiences influence personality.

2. However, **attachment theory** posits that the stability and security of a person's attachment to their parents or caregivers in childhood can affect how the person handles their close relationships (especially romantic/sexual relationships) in adulthood.

LESSON 4

Trait and Social-Cognitive Theories of Personality

I. Trait theories of personality

A. **Traits** are psychological dimensions such as extroversion, tidiness, emotional stability, and curiosity.

B. The trait approach, the approach most often adopted by personality researchers, rests on the assumption that people differ from each other on continuous traits; there are not distinct groups, for example “extraverts” and “introverts,” but instead there is a continuum.

C. Classification of traits

1. The main goal of the trait approach to personality is to catalog all of the dimensions (traits) on which people vary and create a classification of traits that reflects which traits tend to go together.

   Example: Talkativeness, sociability, assertiveness, and gregariousness are all distinct traits, but they also have a lot in common.

2. Ideally, the trait approach would lead to a classification system that tells us what “groups” of traits exist and which traits are in which groups. These groups composed of personality traits are often called **personality factors.**

D. Traits have proven extremely useful for describing personality and predicting people’s characteristic patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving.

1. The trait approach actually cuts across many different theoretical orientations, because traits are a way to conceptualize and measure how people differ from one another.

2. Thus, whether a personality psychologist believes in a psychoanalytic theory of personality or a biological theory, that psychologist will need named traits to talk about personality and individual differences.

E. However, rather than proposing a theory about what causes personality, the trait approach focuses more on how to describe personality—what are the traits on which people differ? Thus, the trait approach has been criticized for being purely descriptive. It is true that traits do not really provide a deep explanation for why people differ.

Example: If Julia's desk is neater than Joe's, and someone explains it is because Julia is tidier than Joe, not much has been explained about either one's behavior or personality.

F. **The lexical hypothesis** is the idea that the concepts important to us will be represented with words in our language. Thus, the personality traits that exist should all have words associated with them. Researchers decided based on this hypothesis they could identify all the traits by looking through the dictionary. *Note.* The term "lexical hypothesis" is not typically found in high school psychology textbooks but is being provided here as useful terminology.

G. Historical personality traits theories

1. **Gordon Allport** viewed personality as consisting of cardinal and central traits. His theory was less concerned with explaining why and more concerned with describing how people differ from each other.

2. **Raymond Cattell** used factor analysis to identify 16 personality traits. The degree to which a person possesses each trait forms his or her unique personality profile.

3. **Hans Eysenck** used factor analysis to determine basic factors, which included introversion versus extroversion and emotionality versus stability.

H. **The Big Five**

1. Researchers asked hundreds of people to rate themselves (or someone they know well) on a subset of these adjectives and then applied a statistical technique called factor analysis to these ratings to see which ones tended to be similar.

2. If a person was rated high on "friendly," was he/she also likely to be rated high on "warm?" This approach led researchers to the conclusion that there are five main factors of personality (or five groups of traits). It is important to note any one set of traits is not better than the others. There can be both positive

and negative examples of each trait. The five factors of personality are listed below.

a. **Extroversion** includes traits like talkativeness, sociability, assertiveness, gregariousness, enthusiasm, and excitement.

   Introversion includes the opposite traits: People low on extroversion are typically reserved and quiet, and they are not impulsive.

b. **Agreeableness** is the tendency to be cooperative, friendly, and compassionate.

   People who are at the extreme high end of agreeableness may conform more easily to what others want, and they tend to be nonconfrontational. People low on agreeableness are stubborn and opinionated; they can be cold, but they also are more willing to stand up for what they think is right even in the face of opposition.

c. **Conscientiousness** is about following the rules and being self-disciplined.

   People high in conscientiousness are tidy and orderly, fulfill their obligations and arrive on time, and strive to achieve high grades. People low in conscientiousness are more likely to be messy, disorganized, forgetful, and less hardworking, but may be more spontaneous.

d. **Neuroticism** is the tendency to experience a variety of distressing emotions. It includes traits like anxiety and self-doubt, impulsivity, anger, and hostility.

   People high in neuroticism tend to experience frequent and intense distressing emotions; they are also more vigilant and aware of risks (e.g., health problems). People low in neuroticism are relatively calm, not easily upset, and less vulnerable to stress, but they may also miss important warning signs.

e. **Openness to experience** is the broadest factor. It includes traits like creativity, appreciation of art, curiosity, and unconventionality.

People high in openness to experience like to try new things. They also like to think about many different things and play with ideas. People low in openness prefer to stick to a routine. They are more conventional and value consistency rather than change.

I. Other classifications

1. Although the Big Five is a popular classification of traits and factors, it is not the only one. Researchers have also proposed classifications that include two, three, four, or six factors. Some researchers also reject the idea of factors altogether and prefer to measure each individual trait.

2. This can lead to personality questionnaires that measure 100 or more traits (e.g., the California Adult Q-Sort). Even the biggest fans of the Big Five agree there are some important personality traits that are not captured by these five factors.

   Example: In everyday life, people use traits like "funny," "arrogant," and "honest" that do not fit neatly into the Big Five.

J. **Personality types:** Many people refer to a personality trait as if it represents a type of person (e.g., extrovert versus introvert). The trait approach rests on the assumption that people can have many levels of a personality trait (e.g., very low, low, medium, high, very high), so the desire to talk about types is misleading. Research shows there are not certain types that are especially common. While any combination of traits can be labeled as a type (e.g., you could call people high on extroversion and low on agreeableness "loudmouths"), no particular combination of traits is more common than any other. Therefore, using the word "type" might be a useful way to talk about personality, but it is not an accurate way of depicting how people differ from one another. People tend to differ from each other in degrees, but not in an all-or-nothing way.

II. Social-cognitive theories of personality

A. **Behaviorism**

1. Behaviorism is the theory that people's behavior is the result of the rewards and punishments they have experienced in the past.

2. Applied to personality, behaviorism is the view that people are different from one another because they have experienced different patterns of rewards and punishments, which have reinforced different behaviors in different people; therefore, they have developed different personalities.

   Example: A person whose parents laughed at her jokes all the time might end up making more jokes later in her life than someone whose parents did not react when she made jokes.

B. **Social learning theory** (Bandura)

1. Social learning theory is based on behaviorism but adds one crucial element: the view that what shapes behavior is not only the actual reinforcements (rewards and punishments) that people experience, but how the people interpret these reinforcements. Social learning theory also says people can learn from observing other people being rewarded or punished.

2. **Albert Bandura** emphasized that people's perceptions of reality might be more important than reality itself.

3. Bandura placed special emphasis on people's expectations about their own efficacy.

4. **Self-efficacy** is a person's belief about whether or not he or she is capable of bringing about desired results.

   Example: Persons with a high degree of self-efficacy may think if they study hard for a test, they will have a better chance of doing well on the test, while persons with a low degree of self-efficacy may think it does not matter how much they study since they expect to not do well on the test.

   Self-efficacy varies between people, but it also varies from context to context.

   Example: A person may have a high degree of self-efficacy in the academic domain but a low degree of self-efficacy in the dating domain.

5. In his social learning theory, Bandura also emphasized how people can learn from others.

    a. People, especially children, are more likely to perform a behavior if they have observed others do it, especially if they have seen others rewarded for this behavior.

    b. Bandura's famous Bobo doll studies (e.g., Bandura, 1961) showed that kids are more likely to treat an ambiguous toy (the Bobo doll) in the same way they observed an adult treat the toy. For example, if a child watched an adult repeatedly hit the Bobo doll, the child was more likely to hit the doll.

6. Bandura emphasized people often have some say about which environments they find themselves in and what behaviors are rewarded or punished in these environments.

    Example: People who choose to become salespeople know enthusiasm and talkativeness are likely to be rewarded.

7. Thus, personality is not only shaped by a person's environment, but personality also partly influences which environments the person chooses in the first place. A person's personality can also alter the environment.

    Example: A gregarious, assertive person may become the captain of her basketball team and change the team environment just by being on the team.

C. Rotter's **expectancy-value theory**

1. Expectancy-value theory predicts people will weigh potential rewards according to their subjective probability.

2. People are more likely to perform a behavior if they believe there is a high probability the behavior will lead to a reward than if they believe the probability of a reward is low.

3. **Julian Rotter** further proposed people might differ from one another in their generalized expectancies; some people might generally feel they are capable of behaving in a way that elicits rewards.

    a. People who have an **internal locus of control** believe they are able to control the rewards and punishments they experience with high probability.

b. People with an **external locus of control,** on the other hand, believe it is hard for them to predict which behaviors will lead to rewards and punishments.

GO TO ACTIVITY 4
Measuring Locus of Control

D. **The density distribution approach** is not typically found in high school psychology textbooks but has a lot of empirical support, may make intuitive sense to students, and helps explain how people's personalities can be both stable and fluctuating.

1. For many years the trait approach to personality and the social-cognitive approach to personality were seen as being in conflict with each other. The trait theory seemed to imply people should behave consistently across different situations, whereas the social-cognitive learning theories emphasized how and why an individual might behave differently in different situations.

2. Recently, Will Fleeson has proposed a model that integrates both perspectives, the **density distribution model.**

3. According to the density distribution model, people have personality traits—general patterns of thinking, feeling, or behaving that reflect their average tendency across all situations.

   Example: Someone who is high on extroversion tends to be quite talkative, energetic, and enthusiastic.

4. However, people also have personality **states**—momentary and perhaps fleeting thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Sometimes a person's traits and states might line up, as when someone who is generally high in extroversion (trait) happens to be talkative and feeling energetic in the moment (state). Other times, a person's state is different from the person's trait level. That is, even people high on extroversion sometimes behave quietly or feel calm (just as people low on extroversion sometimes are talkative and feel enthusiastic).

5. Fleeson proposed traits are simply a way to summarize the average of all of a person's states. That is, being high on the trait of extroversion simply means a person tends to have more high-extroversion states than low-extroversion

states. Thus, a person's traits are really just a "density distribution" of states (how often a person tends to experience different states).

6. This model allows for both the fact that people differ in their traits (some people are more extroverted than others; that is, they tend to have more extroverted states), and, within any given individual, there are also fluctuations in states (extroverts will sometimes act and feel like introverts and vice versa). This leaves room for the trait theorists to study differences between people in their general tendencies (their average states) and for social-cognitive learning theorists to study within-person fluctuations in states (their "if… then" contingencies).

LESSON 5

Humanistic Theories of Personality

I. Overview of humanistic theories of personality

A. **Humanistic psychologists** attempt to understand not just what a person is like—the person's characteristic patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving and where those personality characteristics come from—but what it is like to be that person, what makes that person essentially himself or herself, and what gives the person's life meaning from the person's own subjective perspective. For a humanistic psychologist, to understand a person is to understand how the person understands himself or herself.

B. **Phenomenology** is a person's conscious experience of his or her life. It is very subjective. In short, knowing someone's phenomenology is knowing what it is like to be that person from the inside. *Note.* This term is not typically found in high school psychology textbooks but is being provided here as useful terminology.

C. **The self**

1. The self includes a person's phenomenology, or moment-to-moment subjective experience (the "I" that experiences things), but it also includes the person's **self-concept** and self-understanding (the "me" that someone reflects on when they are being introspective).

2. Regardless of what you are thinking about right this second, you also have a persistent mental representation of who you are.

    a. That mental representation includes your views about your skills and abilities, your sense of worth **(self-esteem),** your memory of your past experiences, your ideals and goals for yourself, and your perception of your own personality.

b. Regardless of whether or not your views of yourself are accurate, they have important implications for how you are likely to think, feel, and behave in your life.

Example: If you think you are extremely persuasive and love being around people, you are more likely to pursue a career in sales than if you think you are shy and unconvincing, even if you are wrong about your personality.

c. Thus, your self-concept plays a causal force in your life, independent of the external reality. This is consistent with the humanistic view that your subjective experience is just as important as the outer world.

d. Furthermore, your self-view is part of your personality in the sense that some personality traits are all about how people see themselves.

Example: People who have a very low opinion of themselves are said to be low on the trait of self-esteem, and people who are deluded about their own importance are said to be high on the trait of narcissism.

e. Furthermore, some people may have more self-awareness than others, and this may itself be a personality difference.

II. Humanistic theories of personality

A. **Abraham Maslow** is best known for his model of the **hierarchy of needs**. Maslow believed a person must satisfy a lower-level need in the hierarchy before being able to focus on a higher-level need. The hierarchy levels starting from the lowest level are organized as follows:

1. **Physiological needs** include food, water, and other essentials of survival.
2. **Safety needs** include security and comfort.
3. **Belongingness needs** include meaningful relationships, social connection, etc.
4. **Self-esteem and status needs** include money, prestige, and skills.
5. If all of the lower-level needs have been fulfilled, people then turn their attention to the highest-level need, the **need for self-actualization,** as defined by Carl Rogers.

B. **Carl Rogers** is best known for his theory of **self-actualization,** which is a person's ability to strive for the highest of possibilities of what they can become. The drive for self-actualization is the drive to maintain and enhance one's life.

1. Rogers believed to really understand a person, you have to understand his or her phenomenology, that life has an intrinsic goal, and that the goal is to actualize oneself.

2. Rogers believed that human behavior—and differences between people—makes sense only when you see the people in the light of each individual's drive for self-actualization.

3. To Rogers, only a person who satisfied this need for self-actualization could become a **"fully functioning person"**—a happy, fulfilled person living an authentic existence.

4. Rogers also believed one necessary ingredient for achieving self-actualization is to experience **unconditional positive regard** from the people you care most about. Unconditional positive regard means receiving love and support that does not depend on what or how you're doing (i.e., it is unconditional).

    a. If your loved ones (especially your parents when you are young) do not have unconditional positive regard for you, this will limit your ability to self-actualize and become a fully functioning person.

    b. Parents (or close others) who do not provide unconditional positive regard send the message you are only worthy of love under certain conditions—these are called **conditions of worth.**

    c. Thus, one important source of personality differences between people, according to Rogers's theory, stems from the conditions of worth (or the unconditional positive regard) they experienced in life, especially from their parents when they were young.

C. **George Kelly** was a psychologist whose ideas bridged humanistic and social-cognitive approaches.

1. Like other humanistic psychologists, Kelly believed a person's understanding of the world is fundamental to who that person is; however, he also emphasized that the person's understanding is a cognitive process, which Kelly called a **personal construct,** a lens through which a person sees the world

2. Kelly developed the **Role Construct Repertory Test (Rep test)** to assess people's personal constructs.

    a. In the Rep test, people list groups of three things (three objects, three people, three ideas, etc.) and then are asked to describe how two of the three things in each list are similar to each other and different from the third.

    b. The qualities people use to distinguish the items on their lists are their personal constructs.

    Example: Some people might describe two of the items as more powerful than the third, and this might be a dimension along which they regularly perceive the world, while another person may describe the two items another way, indicating they perceive the world according to how aesthetically pleasing things (or people) are.

    c. Kelly believed that individual personal constructs come from how individuals interpreted their own past experiences. Therefore, personal constructs are an individual's responsibility, and if an individual does not like the constructs he or she has created, it is up to the individual to change the constructs and how they see the world.

    d. Kelly believed past experiences themselves did not dictate an individual's personality (or personal constructs), but what individuals draw from past experiences shapes the individuals into who they are. Furthermore, he thought individuals were responsible for their interpretations of their experiences.

    e. Kelly believed a person's personal constructs are the most important aspect of a person's personality and to really understand another person, you must understand his or her personal constructs.

See Appendix B for information on existentialism and positive psychology, topics related to humanistic theories of personality but typically covered in other units on the psychology course.

LESSON 6

Personality: Culture, Work, and Health

I. Personality and culture

A. Culture has an important influence on how a person thinks and feels, potentially impacting the person's personal constructs and the way the person makes meaning out of his or her life. Culture also impacts a person's sense of self.

B. One dimension along which cultures differ is the continuum from individualistic cultures to collectivistic cultures.

1. **Individualistic cultures** (e.g., the mainstream culture in the United States) emphasize and value the self more than interpersonal relationships.

    a. Individuals are seen as separate from one another, and independence is valued. A person's rights as an individual are often prioritized over obligations to others, and cultural traditions are relatively weak.

    b. Individualistic cultures tend to have higher levels of loneliness and depression, but on the other hand, they also tend to be more tolerant of individual quirks and idiosyncrasies, allowing for more diversity in lifestyles, preferences, etc.

2. **Collectivistic cultures** (e.g., Eastern Asian cultures, such as Chinese or Japanese) emphasize and value interpersonal relationships over the individual.

    a. In collectivistic cultures, a person's obligation to their group (e.g., family) is prioritized over the person's own desires or personal goals. Social hierarchies and cultural traditions tend to be stronger.

    b. People tend to do more group activities and spend less time alone. Collectivistic cultures value group harmony over personal desires or self-advancement.

    c. Self-promotion is considered more acceptable in individualistic cultures than collectivistic cultures.

3. Of course all cultures combine some elements of individualism and collectivism, and within any culture there will be individuals who are more individualistic than others. Thus, this cultural variation has important implications for personality assessment.

    a. First, individualism-collectivism may be a personality trait in itself. Some people, no matter what culture they live in, likely value independence more than others, while others place more value on social harmony and are willing to forego personal goals or advancement for the sake of their family, company, or other group.

    b. Second, it is possible that personality differences between people are less salient in collectivistic cultures than in individualistic cultures; some researchers have argued theory and research on personality are more prevalent in individualistic cultures than in collectivistic cultures.

    c. Third, perhaps even in collectivistic cultures, people are curious about and attuned to how people differ from one another, but the dimensions along which personality is measured or judged may be entirely different. For example, while the Big Five may be the personality constructs of individualistic cultures, other traits or personality dimensions may be the focus of collectivistic cultures when they are differentiating among individuals.

II. Personality has consequences

A. The power of personality at work

1. Personality has been shown to predict how well people do in school and at work.

    a. In school, the trait that most strongly predicts getting better grades is conscientiousness (Noftle & Robins, 2007).

    b. At work, job performance and success are related to different personality traits depending on the job. One longitudinal study found that personality measured in adolescence predicted who was employed and how high the status of their job was 46 years later (Judge et al., 1999). The people who were most successful at work as adults, as adolescents had been assessed as more extroverted, less neurotic, less agreeable (somewhat surprisingly), and more conscientious than others.

2. Roberts and his coauthors (2007) identified five possible explanations of how personality predicts who does well in school and at work:

    a. Personality may affect how attracted a person is to a particular course of study or career. People may choose college majors or careers suited to their personality.

    b. Personality may affect who is recruited into a particular career. Other people (e.g., employers, teachers, advisors) may encourage a person to pursue a field that suits his or her personality.

    c. Personality may affect the impact a person has on his or her work environment. People whose personalities are well suited to their role at work or at school may perform better and create a better work environment for themselves (and others).

    d. Personality may predict who drops out of school, a job, or career.

    e. Personality may have a direct effect on performance. Some personality traits may give people advantages for some jobs or educational settings.

B. Personality for health and longevity (Roberts et al., 2007)

1. Personality has been shown to predict how healthy a person is and even how long a person lives (longevity).

2. The traits most strongly associated with being healthy and living longer are high conscientiousness, high extroversion (especially the positive emotionality aspect of extroversion), and low neuroticism.

3. Some aspects of agreeableness (especially low hostility) have also been shown to predict longevity, but less strongly.

4. Roberts et al. proposed three possible explanations for why personality can predict health and longevity:

    a. First, there may be a direct biological link between some personality traits and physiological reactions that affect a person's health.

    Example: Hostility (a facet of low agreeableness) is associated with physiological reactions implicated in poor health.

b. Second, personality may affect health-promoting or health-damaging behaviors.

Example: People high in conscientiousness are more likely to get regular check-ups and follow doctors' orders, and they are less likely to smoke.

c. Third, personality may affect how a person reacts to illness.

Example: People high in neuroticism may be more likely to get especially stressed by the diagnosis of an illness.

C. Personality in relationships: Personality has been shown to predict who is likely to have more satisfying romantic relationships and more likely to get divorced.

1. The personality traits most strongly associated with divorce are high neuroticism, low agreeableness, and low conscientiousness.

2. The main reason personality can predict who gets divorced is people with more pleasant personalities (low neuroticism, high agreeableness, and high conscientiousness) have more pleasant relationships.

3. However, Roberts and his coauthors provide three more specific possible explanations:

a. Personality may predict who experiences more conflict and stress in their relationships.

Example: People high in neuroticism may be more likely to create problems that could have been avoided.

b. Personality may predict how people react to challenges in their relationships.

Example: People high in neuroticism may be more likely to see small obstacles as extremely stressful.

c. Personality may affect the behavior of a person's partner.

Example: Highly disagreeable people may elicit more negative behaviors (e.g., criticism) from their partners.

ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1

What Is Personality? A Personal Appraisal

Developed by

Kenneth W. Kerber

BACK TO CONTENT OUTLINE

Introduction

This activity helps students identify and examine their implicit personality theories and makes personality theories concrete and understandable. It is appropriate for classes in introductory psychology, personality, social psychology, and personal adjustment. No prior knowledge of psychology is necessary. Advance preparation is minimal, and the activity is appropriate for classes of all sizes. This can be done in class or outside of class with a writing assignment.

Concept

The field of personality often is associated with comprehensive personality theories such as those developed by Sigmund Freud, Gordon Allport, and Raymond Cattell. Even a partial listing of current theories of personality

would include scores of noted theorists and their viewpoints. The tremendous variety of personality theories can be made more understandable for the introductory psychology student by the grouping of the theories into broad categories such as the psychodynamic, humanistic, cognitive, trait, and learning approaches. Although interrelated, these approaches to personality use different concepts to achieve an understanding of human behavior and mental processes.

In his theory of personal constructs, Kelly (1963) argued that each of us, like a scientist, attempts to predict and control events. We continually evaluate our experiences and use our interpretations of reality to understand and control the world around us. According to this viewpoint, each of us has our own theory of human personality because people form a major part of the reality that we attempt to understand and control.

This activity encourages students to think about their personal theory of personality and consider how it relates to prominent personality theories in the field of psychology. The exercise and resulting discussion can serve as an introduction to more detailed material about major types of personality theories.

Materials and Instructions

Introduce this activity with a brief discussion of the term *personality.* Distinguish among popular meanings of the word—such as social skill, charm, or attractiveness—and the meaning of the term for psychologists—that is, not our public impression but our essential nature as human beings (defined in this lesson plan as "individual differences in characteristic patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving").

Give each student a copy of a worksheet (you will need to create one). On top of a sheet of paper, put the following instructions: "Below are some concepts that may be important to you in the way you think about your own personality and the personalities of the people around you. Think about each item and check off the three items that are most important regarding your view of human personality." Below these instructions, provide a list of terms such as the following:

external environment	the self
temperament	unconscious motives
interpretation of experience	observable behavior
conscious awareness	enduring characteristics
childhood experiences	expectations
rewards and punishments	subjective feelings
abilities	sexual instincts
organizations of reality	

After the list, add the following instructions: “In the space below, explain why you chose the three items you checked off.”

The list shown here was designed to contain three concepts associated with each of five major approaches to personality: psychodynamic (childhood experiences, unconscious motives, sexual instincts), humanistic (conscious awareness, the self, subjective feelings), cognitive (interpretations of experience, organization of reality, expectations), trait (temperament, abilities, enduring characteristics), and learning (external environment, rewards and punishments, observable behavior). The concepts that the terms on your list illustrate should coincide with those you will discuss in class or that will be covered in associated reading assignments. Try to select terms that match the students’ psychological sophistication.

Students can finish the handout in class or as a homework assignment. Upon everyone’s completion of the assignment, have them discuss the concepts they chose and why. As part of the discussion, point out the association between particular concepts and different approaches to personality as a way of introducing major types of theories. Encourage students to consider how their personal view of human personality relates to major theories in psychology. In fact, this exercise can provide the basis for a paper in which students explain more fully their own view of personality in relation to the work of psychological theorists.

It is also interesting to collect the completed handout and tally the number of students who chose each concept, reporting the results to the class. Students can compare their choices with the class as a whole, and you can gain some insight into the class’s view of personality.

Discussion

You can use this activity to address several important questions about the study of personality, including the following: What is personality? What is a personality theory? Why have psychologists proposed so many different personality theories? Is one theory correct and the others wrong? Have factor analytic approaches to personality answered that question (e.g., the Big Five, see Goldberg, 1990)? What functions are served by personality theories in psychology? Does the average person actually develop his or her own theory of personality? If so, how does this activity differ from that of a psychologist formulating a new theory? What functions are served by personal theories of human behavior? Are there good reasons why each of us should evaluate our own view of human personality?

In the end, it is probably quite reasonable to conclude, along with Hall, Lindzey, and Campbell (2001), that no single definition of personality can be applied with any generality and that personality is defined by the particular concepts used by the theorist. With these conclusions in mind, it makes sense to introduce students to personality theories with an activity based on important psychological concepts.

Human personality is precisely the kind of complex subject matter about which theorists—and students—can easily disagree. You can enhance students' understanding of the enormous difficulties a personality theorist faces if you involve them in the theorist's task, even for a short time. By encouraging students to struggle with the complexity inherent in defining personality, you can make the study of personality theories more interesting and perhaps more memorable.

For other teaching activities that explore implicit personality theory, see Embree (1986) and Wang (1997).

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ACTIVITY 2

Personality and Personality Assessment

Developed by

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From original TOPSS unit lesson plan on *Personality*

Introduction

This activity provides a vehicle for the discussion of numerous issues, including test construction, gender differences, operational definition, reliability, validity, methodology, and so forth. There is virtually no advance preparation, but you will need to type and reproduce the personality test between classes. Because of the data collection component, the activity extends over two class sessions. You should familiarize students with the guidelines for research with human participants. The activity could be used with classes of virtually any size.

BACK TO CONTENT OUTLINE

Concept

This activity is a multipart exercise that focuses on personality and personality assessment. It can be used as a starting point for discussion of a wide variety of issues surrounding personality and personality assessment, as well as issues of reliability and validity, difficulty in defining constructs, issues in test construction, and so forth. The exercise described is for a class of 24 students; the procedures and groups can be modified to fit classes of different sizes.

Instructions

Begin the personality activity by making some introductory remarks about the nature of personality as a “construct” and the difficulty psychologists have in defining it. Ask students to call out terms that they feel are part of the construct of personality, commonly called personality traits or characteristics. Write each of the terms on the chalkboard. Usually in 5 or 10 minutes there are 25 to 30 terms on the board, including such terms as sense of humor, sociability, friendliness, honesty, sincerity, leadership, and so forth.

At this point, tell the students they are going to participate in the construction of a personality test. To do this, they are to narrow their list of terms to eight they feel are the major components of personality. Encourage students to eliminate most terms from the list, because otherwise the class will spend large amounts of time in debate without reducing the number of terms. Some terms can be eliminated quickly because most students will agree they are of lesser importance. In other cases terms can be combined; for example, sociability and friendliness, or honesty and trustworthiness. The final list of eight terms is usually agreed on about 20 to 25 minutes after the start of the class.

Quickly divide the class into eight groups, each composed of three students. (This can be done easily by forming groups where students are seated so they do not have to move around.) Assign one of the terms to each of the eight groups and tell the students they have 10 to 15 minutes to write, as a group, two test items they believe will measure that particular characteristic of personality. To ensure uniformity in the format of the items, provide several examples for the students, typically using one of the terms not included in their final eight. (This means you should prepare sample items for several potential constructs prior to class.) For example, suppose *leadership* is a term that the class did not select. You might give them sample items such as "When I join clubs, I like to assume one of the officer positions in the club" or "People usually seek my opinion when they are having problems." Make students understand the questions need to be written so they can be answered true or false.

Tell students their items will be used to construct a personality test made up of 16 questions, that is, the two items they generated for each of the eight terms the class selected. (Poorly written items may be included because the results they are likely to produce will lead to an interesting discussion.) Type the tests and make one copy for each student. Tell them to take one copy of their test and administer it to two students (preferably one of each sex) who are not enrolled in any of the introductory psychology classes. Include a disclaimer in the test that indicates it has no validity and is being used solely for instructional purposes. Indicate on answer sheets only the sex of the person answering the questions.

After the test has been administered, begin the analysis by writing the numbers 1 through 16 on the chalkboard and listing the number of true responses given for each item by sex. This tallying procedure is accomplished easily by having the students vote by a show of one, both, or no hands. For example, begin with responses from men, starting with item 1, by asking for a show of one hand for true responses. Students would hold up one hand, both hands, or no hands, depending on the responses of

their male subjects. Record the response frequencies for female subjects in the same manner. It is also important to note the total number of female and male subjects in the survey to provide a context for evaluating the data. Students should have their copy of the survey in front of them so the discussion that follows is meaningful. The recording of these responses on the board usually takes no more than 10 minutes.

Discussion

I usually focus the discussion on three kinds of findings. First, are there any items that show major sex differences in terms of frequency of responses? Typically one or two items will show such differences, and I ask students to speculate on the reasons for the different response patterns. Second, we look at the pairs of items that are supposed to be measuring the same characteristic. (Remember that items are not adjacent in the test because they are randomly distributed prior to typing.) It is common to find that one item in a pair will produce a response pattern that is quite different from the other, which makes for an interesting discussion about what the two items may be measuring. Third, we look at the items to see if any were uniformly regarded in one way, that is, items that nearly everyone answered either true or false.

This activity has many benefits, including the following: (a) It teaches students about the complexity of psychological constructs; (b) it taps an area — personality — that is familiar and of great interest to them; (c) it gives them firsthand experience with the issue of face validity; (d) it provides them with an opportunity to participate in small-group activities (i.e., those with two to four students); (e) it allows them to actually collect psychological data; (f) it gives them some experience in thinking about the meaning of questionnaire results; (g) it shows them some of the problems inherent in psychological assessment; (h) it gives them a closer look at some of the problems of the trait approach to personality; and (i) it provides an excellent vehicle for class discussion with minimal involvement from you. In addition, this exercise can provide a teaching bridge into many other substantive areas of psychology.

ACTIVITY 3.1

Freud's Personality Theory: Id, Ego, Superego Role-Play Activity

Developed by

Mario A. Nogare

From original TOPSS unit lesson plan on *Personality*

Concept

This two-part group activity is designed to have students indicate their understanding of the interplay between the three elements of Freud's personality theory. The first activity involves three students, and the second is designed to involve a larger number of students.

Materials

You may want to prepare three signs made of construction paper and labeled: "ID," "EGO," "SUPEREGO."

BACK TO CONTENT OUTLINE

Instructions

In the first situation, select three students, one of which will represent the id, one the ego, and one the superego. Read the following situation and have them role-play the interchange between the personality elements.

The school year is ending, and final exams are near. You have done well but are having difficulty in your psychology class. You know that in order to get a grade of "B," the minimum acceptable by your parents, you must score an "A" on the final. You have tried studying but feel it is an unattainable goal. As you are leaving your locker to go home on the afternoon prior to the test, you find a group of papers in the hall which has apparently been dropped by someone. You look down, and find that one of the dropped papers has the heading "PSYCHOLOGY: FINAL EXAM." You pick up the paper and look at it quickly, noticing that no one has seen you. What do you do next?

In the second situation, have the students number off from one through three. You may have the ones act as ids, the twos as egos, and the threes as superegos.

All of the egos are a group of friends. One of the egos is a boy named "Frank," whose parents are going away over the weekend. They have indicated that Frank may stay home but may not go out at night or have friends in. The friends are unhappy that Frank cannot join in the weekend fun. His girlfriend, Juanita, is especially unhappy. Someone suggests they have a small party at Frank's house anyway. Frank is skeptical, especially since his grandparents will be home and live on the corner, but is willing to be convinced.

Have the students role-play this situation. Rules are that the ids and superegos may only speak directly to their own ego, and egos may speak only to other egos.

A good concluding discussion may be held concerning the inner dialogues the students themselves have experienced in situations of conflict and the factors that enter into their final decisions. This also provides a good opportunity to have the students evaluate the validity of Freud's concepts.

ACTIVITY 3.2

Defense Mechanisms Application Activity

Developed by

Wendy Hart
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Instructions

Present the following scenario to the class:

> *Although you love the class, respect the teacher, and dedicated a whole weekend to studying, you just discovered that you failed a test in your psychology class.*

OPTION A: Ask a student to role-play each of the different reactions and ask the students' classmates to identify which defense mechanism the student is attempting to portray. Simply cut the worksheet into strips and give each "actor" one of the reactions. You will also need a student to play the role of the teacher passing back the tests.

OPTION B: Give a copy of the worksheet (on next page) to each student to complete independently.

BACK TO CONTENT OUTLINE

WORKSHEET

A. Denial	**B. Displacement**	**C. Intellectualization**
D. Projection	**E. Rationalization**	**F. Reaction formation**
G. Regression	**H. Repression**	**I. Sublimation**

1. ____ When the teacher hands you the test you failed, you honestly exclaim, “I don’t even remember taking the test!”

2. ____ When the teacher hands you the test you failed, you hand it back and say, “This can’t be mine. You must have changed the name.”

3. ____ You are so upset about failing the test you use your anxious energy to start cleaning out and organizing your backpack.

4. ____ Although you feel stupid because you failed the test, you compensate by telling the other students who performed poorly on the test they are stupid.

5. ____ You are so upset about failing the test you break your pencil.

6. ____ You are so upset about failing the test you start to cry.

7. ____ When the teacher hands you the test you failed, you feel like giving up and never studying again. Instead, you facilitate a study group to prepare for the next test.

8. ____ You justify your poor test performance by saying you couldn’t concentrate while you were studying because you were distracted by your younger sibling. Plus, you also argue the test was too difficult and your teacher didn’t teach the material well.

9. ____ Although you are very upset about your poor test performance, you refuse to acknowledge your negative emotions. Instead, you very calmly, almost robotically, go over your test to see which questions you missed and ask the teacher when the next test will be administered.

ANSWER KEY

A. Denial	**B. Displacement**	**C. Intellectualization**
D. Projection	**E. Rationalization**	**F. Reaction formation**
G. Regression	**H. Repression**	**I. Sublimation**

1. **H** When the teacher hands you the test you failed, you honestly exclaim, “I don’t even remember taking the test!”

2. **A** When the teacher hands you the test you failed, you hand it back and say, “This can’t be mine. You must have changed the name.”

3. **I** You are so upset about failing the test you use your anxious energy to start cleaning out and organizing your backpack.

4. **D** Although you feel stupid because you failed the test, you compensate by telling the other students who performed poorly on the test they are stupid.

5. **B** You are so upset about failing the test you break your pencil.

6. **G** You are so upset about failing the test you start to cry.

7. **F** When the teacher hands you the test you failed, you feel like giving up and never studying again. Instead, you facilitate a study group to prepare for the next test.

8. **E** You justify your poor test performance by saying that you couldn’t concentrate while you were studying because you were distracted by your younger sibling. Plus, you also argue the test was too difficult and your teacher didn’t teach the material well.

9. **C** Although you are very upset about your poor test performance, you refuse to acknowledge your negative emotions. Instead, you very calmly, almost robotically, go over your test to see which questions you missed and ask the teacher when the next test will be administered.

ACTIVITY 4

Measuring Locus of Control

Directions

Give each student a copy of the *Locus of Control Survey,* which can be found at the following website: http://wilderdom.com/psychology/loc/RotterLOC29.html

Working independently, students should read both statements for each item, decide which statement they most agree with, and circle the corresponding letter to that statement for each item.

After completing the survey, use the scoring guide, which can be found at the following website: http://wilderdom.com/psychology/loc/RotterLOC29Scoring.html

Twenty-three of the items are correlated with locus of control, with an additional six filler items. The higher the student's score (13+), the more internal his/her locus of control. Teachers may wish to review each of the 23 items to explain how each statement reflects an internal or external locus of control.

BACK TO CONTENT OUTLINE

CRITICAL THINKING AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

Exercise/Discussion Topics for Personality

1. Which theory do you think best explains the definition and development of personality?
2. Why would it be important for therapists and clinicians to have a well-developed view of personality theory to do their job well?
3. How might the controversy surrounding TV (or movies) and aggressiveness be explained by a behaviorist?
4. How might we use Roger's theory in everyday communications and relations with others?
5. What might be reasons why the Big Five model of personality traits is the most commonly used model in contemporary personality research?
6. Do you think personality is mostly stable or unstable across lifetimes? Situations? Provide real-world examples to support your position.

DISCUSSION/ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Compare and contrast objective and projective personality tests. What does research suggest about the validity of each of these types of tests?
2. Select a person from current events or history whom you believe is or was self-actualized. Use examples to illustrate how this person's characteristics exemplify Maslow's model.
3. Riley has been diagnosed as extremely introverted. Explain how psychoanalytic behaviorist, cognitive, humanistic, and trait theorists would explain how this personality developed.
4. Explain the difference between traits and types.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

From the *Psychoanalysis and Psychodynamic Psychology* TOPSS Unit Lesson Plan

Carl Jung

Carl Jung (1875-1961) began as a follower of Freud but thought Freud overemphasized sexual motivation. Jung was more interested in the influence of the "collective unconscious," a body of universal symbols and experiences he believed were passed through generations. Jungian psychoanalysts focus on interpreting the symbolic archetypes in patients' dreams and fantasies. Jung also believed females have an "animus," or male side, and males have an "anima," or female side. In addition, Jung emphasized all humans have a "shadow," the dark (evil) side of human nature.

Neo-Freudians

A. **Alfred Adler** (1870-1937) was an early follower of Freud, but he later founded his own distinct school of thought emphasizing the centrality of inferiority feelings (the term "inferiority complex" derives from Adler). Adler believed an inferiority complex gives rise to the "drive for superiority" that can last a lifetime.

B. **Karen Horney** (1885-1952) was one of the earliest feminist psychoanalysts. She argued Freud's theory of little girls' "penis envy" underestimated the role of cultural influences (like sexism) that contributed to girls' feelings of inferiority; she saw women's strivings for power as a response to social inequality rather than penis envy. Horney postulated we develop "basic anxiety" early in life and, if unresolved, develop "basic hostility" toward others as adults.

C. **Erik Erikson** (1902-1994) focused on the full human life cycle, describing eight stages of psychosocial development, which are stages of conflict from birth to death, in contrast to Freud's primary emphasis on childhood stages of psychosexual development. Erikson believed the first stage, trust versus mistrust, was the most important.

APPENDIX B

Additional Humanistic Theories of Personality

Existentialism

Note. This is typically taught as a theory or as a treatment.

Existentialism is a philosophical model that dates back to the mid-1800s. The most famous existential philosophers were Nietzsche, Sartre, and Kierkegaard. Existentialists believe that one of the biggest challenges in life is accepting responsibility for your own experiences (existentialists believe there is no outside source of meaning; each person must create meaning for themselves). For existentialists, only an individual's own experience (or phenomenology) is under his or her own control, and therefore the individual has a responsibility to make conscious choices about how to experience his or her own life.

For personality psychologists, the implications of this view are that there are important individual differences in how people face this challenge. Understanding how a person deals with making meaning in his life and taking control of his own phenomenology is central to understanding the person and his personality.

Positive Psychology

See also the TOPSS Unit Lesson Plan on *Positive Psychology.*

More recently, a new movement in psychology has followed in humanists' footsteps. Positive psychology is the study of positive human experiences, including happiness, self-actualization, leadership, compassion, and gratitude. This movement arose out of the feeling among many researchers that psychological science has focused almost exclusively on psychopathology and malfunction. While it is important to understand why human beings sometimes suffer or hurt each other, the positive psychology movement is committed to the idea that it is also important to understand

why and how humans sometimes flourish, succeed, and are good to each other. For personality research, this has meant complementing the study of personality disorders and personality pathology with the study of positive personality traits (sometimes called character traits or virtues). These include courage, compassion, and wisdom, among many others. It has also meant studying the positive side of well-being to understand why some people are especially happy and fulfilled in life. One topic that has received a great deal of attention from positive psychology researchers is Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory. This theory says that real happiness comes not just from pursuing pleasure (hedonia), but from fulfilling our needs and goals (eudaimonia). According to self-determination theory, human beings have a need to pursue goals they value intrinsically (things they value for themselves, not as means to an end). Furthermore, humans share three fundamental intrinsic goals: autonomy, which is the freedom to make your own choices; competence, which is developing skills and mastering something; and relatedness, which is having meaningful relationships with others.

Flow

Another topic that has received a lot of attention from the positive psychology movement (but actually predates it) is Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow. Flow is the state people are in when they are doing something challenging and engaging. It is the experience you have when you are so engrossed in something, working hard at it, you don't even notice time passing. Csikszentmihalyi believed this state was only achievable when doing something intrinsically enjoyable (not just enjoyable because of the outcomes it produces) and that this is the optimal experience one can have in life. He agreed with other humanists that our phenomenology is of utmost experience, and his theory of flow was a theory about how to optimize one's phenomenology. With respect to personality theory, flow can be seen as a dimension on which people differ—some people are lucky enough to experience flow every day, whereas others may never or almost never experience it.

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